



The Impact of Trauma and War on Work

You or a co-worker may experience trauma on the job, or in your personal life. It is common for Service Members, contractors, or others who spent time in a war zone or hazardous region to have reactions to trauma. They may find it hard to change to a “civilian” mindset once back home with family, friends, and co-workers. Civilians who go through trauma may also face challenges reintegrating with family and work. Yet most people adjust successfully. It can help to understand the reactions that commonly happen after trauma and to know when additional help is needed.

Common Reactions to Trauma

Almost any person will have reactions after a traumatic event such as war, accident, assault, or disaster. These reactions are normal, especially during the first weeks. Common reactions include:

Physical Reactions

- Trouble sleeping, overly tired
- Stomach upset, trouble eating
- Sweating when thinking of the trauma
- Rapid heartbeat or breathing
- Existing health problems become worse

Emotional Reactions

- Bad dreams
- Flashbacks or frequent unwanted memories
- Feeling nervous, helpless, or fearful
- Shock, being numb, unable to feel happy
- Anger, agitation, or easily upset or annoyed
- Feeling guilt, self-blame, shame
- Feeling sad, hopeless, or abandoned

Behavioral Reactions

- Trouble concentrating
- Edgy, jumpy, and easily startled
- Problems doing tasks at work or school
- Being on guard, high concern about safety
- Avoiding people or places related to the trauma
- Too much drinking, smoking, or drug use
- Neglect of exercise, nutrition, or health
- Aggressive driving, particularly if feeling upset

Most individuals will recover over time. If these reactions begin to interfere with your family, work, or social life to the extent that you can't function effectively, seek help. You are not alone. Seeking help is a sign of strength.

When to Seek Help

Common reactions after trauma should decrease over time. Yet in some cases, these reactions may disrupt your life, making it hard to continue with your daily activities. Seek additional help if these feelings don't go away, if reactions get worse, or if you notice:

- Relationship troubles — frequent and intense conflicts, poor communication, inability to meet responsibilities
- Problems at work, school, or with everyday tasks — frequent absences, conflicts, inability to meet deadlines or concentrate, poor performance
- Excessive substance use
- Thoughts or talk of hurting yourself or someone else

People are there to help with readjustment issues. There are many resources available to you (see below). Check with your Employee Assistance Program for more information.

Stigma about mental health issues can be a barrier for people who need help. If you think someone you know may be suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or another a mental health problem, it's important for them to work to solve the problem. Talking to a counselor, doctor, or chaplain can be the first step.

Effective treatments exist. Trauma reactions and PTSD can be treated, and early detection can prevent more serious problems from developing. www.ptsd.va.gov/public/where-to-get-help.asp

Resources for More Information

VA National Center for PTSD

www.ptsd.va.gov

The VA National Center for PTSD conducts research and education on trauma and PTSD. The website offers extensive information on coping, treatment, educational materials, and more. Materials for a variety of audiences, including Veterans and their families, providers, researchers, and others.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves (ESGR)

www.esgr.org

Toll-free (in the US): 800-336-4590

Provides assistance with issues between Service Members and employers.

Veterans Transition Assistance Program

www.turbotap.org/portal/transition/resources/About_Us

A collaboration of the US Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Labor, to help with transition from military to civilian life.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Federal Occupational Health's Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

www.foh.dhhs.gov/whatwedo/eap/eap.asp

Assistance available 7 days/week, 24 hours/day

800-222-0364 or 888-262-7848 (TTY)

Your local EAP Office may also provide assistance.